United Nations A/69/867–S/2015/253

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.: General
15 April 2015

Original: English

General Assembly
Sixty-ninth session
Agenda item 50
United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

Security Council
Seventieth year

Identical letters dated 13 April 2015 from the Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

In follow-up to the emergency consultations of the Security Council on 6 April, I convey once again the grave concerns of the Palestinian leadership about the dire situation of Palestine refugees in Syria as a result of the ongoing armed conflict there. In particular, we continue to call the international community's attention to the humanitarian catastrophe in the Yarmouk refugee camp.

As indicated in the briefing to the Security Council by the Commissioner General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Pierre Krähenbühl, the situation in the Yarmouk refugee camp has precipitously deteriorated following the 2 April takeover of the camp by terrorists affiliated with ISIL and other terror groups. It is a situation constituting a direct threat to the lives of the nearly 18,000 Palestine refugees who remain in the camp, of the original 160,000 residents. Refugees are suffering death and injury, as well as further destruction of their homes, dispossession and displacement, as the wanton violence rages around them.

These recent dangerous developments follow a suffocating two-year siege of the Yarmouk camp, which has prevented all but minimal delivery of food, water, medicines and other vital civilian essentials to the camp residents, despite the repeated efforts of UNRWA to access the camp and provide care for the Palestine refugees, including under circumstances endangering the lives of humanitarian workers. This siege has inflicted widespread malnutrition, starvation, disease and poverty on the refugees, including 3,500 children, depleting their coping and survival abilities and leaving them in a severely weakened state. The situation in Yarmouk is one of extreme deprivation and desperation, fear and trauma, affecting every man, woman and child in the camp.

These shocking developments, along with the fact that the conflict has affected nearly every Palestine refugee camp in Syria — with the displacement of more than

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half of the estimated 540,000 Palestine refugees in Syria and the fleeing of around 80,000 of those Palestine refugees to neighbouring countries, mainly Lebanon and Jordan, along with the drowning of dozens of Palestine refugees in the Mediterranean Sea as they have attempted to escape the ravages of conflict — are a testament to the inhumanity of this deplorable situation and to the depth of the injustice borne by the Palestine refugees for more than six decades as they have awaited redress of their plight and fulfilment of their rights in accordance with international law and General Assembly resolution 194 (III) following Al-Nakba of 1948, when they were forcibly uprooted from their homes in Palestine with the establishment of the State of Israel and dispersed throughout the region.

Today, the disturbing reports of depravity and the appalling images that have emerged from the Yarmouk camp must be cause for alarm and action by the international community, particularly the Security Council. Yarmouk must not be allowed to become yet another stain of shame and disgrace for the international community, further symbolizing its abject failure to uphold international humanitarian law and human rights. We echo the appeals made by you that the world "cannot stand by and watch a massacre unfold" and that "the people of Yarmouk must not be abandoned", and we call on the Council to act urgently and responsibly to address this tragedy.

We recall Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014), as well as the press elements issued by the Council on 6 April 2015 in response to the critical situation in Yarmouk, and urge the full respect of their provisions. The obligation to protect civilians in situations of armed conflict must be respected by all parties. Human life must be respected and preserved. All efforts must be made to bring an end to the violence and ensure the safety and protection of the Palestine refugees and all civilians in Syria, including inside the Yarmouk camp, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Simultaneously, all efforts must be made to secure immediate, sustained and unimpeded humanitarian access and assistance to the camp's residents, as well as to ensure the safe exit of any civilians who seek refuge from the violence in Yarmouk. Humanitarian needs are massive and are growing by the day. We commend the efforts being undertaken in this regard by Commissioner General Krähenbühl and the Deputy Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria, Ramzy Ezzeldin Ramzy, and express our strongest hopes for the success of these efforts. Moreover, we commend the continuing efforts of UNRWA to provide emergency aid to the Palestine refugees in dire need in Syria and in the neighbouring countries as a result of this crisis, despite the very difficult and unstable circumstances that prevail.

At this time, we must also reiterate the official position of the Palestine Liberation Organization to maintain the neutrality of the Palestine refugee camps in Syria and the refusal to be drawn into the ongoing conflict, including in the Yarmouk refugee camp. We reaffirm our readiness to work with all stakeholders to bring an end to the aggression and to prevent a further calamity in the camp. We thus repeat our appeals for the exertion of all possible efforts to ensure the protection of the Palestine refugees and all civilians in Syria, in accordance with international humanitarian law, in order to spare innocent lives and avert further devastation. The Palestinian leadership fully shares the international community's hopes for a political solution to end the horrific conflict in Syria.

In closing, we reiterate that this tragic crisis reconfirms the extreme vulnerability of the Palestine refugees and the need for a just solution to their plight, in the context of a lasting Palestinian-Israeli peace and a comprehensive regional peace, objectives to which the Palestinian leadership remains firmly committed and continues to exert all efforts to achieve in accordance with international law, resolution 194 (III) and the Arab Peace Initiative.

I would be grateful if you would arrange to have the text of the present letter distributed as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 50, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Riyad **Mansour**
Ambassador
Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations